



**TOWN OF MANSFIELD
Special Town Council Meeting
Mansfield Community Center – Community Room
December 20, 2004**

Minutes

Present: A. Whitham Blair, B. Clouette, G. Haddad, A. Hawkins, H. Koehn, E. Paterson,
C. Paulhus, C. Redding, C. Schaefer

Staff: M. Berliner, K. Grunwald, M. Hart, L. Hultgren, J. Smith, W. Topliff

1. Call to Order

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 6:43 p.m.

2. Revaluation

Walter Topliff, Town Assessor, conducted a comprehensive presentation regarding the town's revaluation project. Discussion topics included: revaluation cycle; the purpose of revaluation; mass appraisal; steps in a revaluation; key objectives; list of changes in data for 2004; sales; income producing property; revaluation results and "where do we go from here."

Bruce Clouette pointed out that we need to make sure we educate people concerning the purpose and ramifications of revaluation. Martin Berliner responded that staff would certainly engage in education efforts. Fortunately, revaluation in Mansfield has not been a significant community issue as we have little commercial and industrial property, and there is little shift in the tax burden.

Carl Schafer added that it is important that residents know that their assessment does not mean that taxes will automatically increase. Jeff Smith stated that for the next budget year staff would examine what the mill rate would be with no revaluation in order to provide a true analysis.

Bruce asked as to the origin of the UConn data? Walter answered that UConn provides the town with basic information such as building plans, etc., and that town staff subsequently inspects the university property.

3. Sustainability

Lon Hultgren suggested that staff prepare a list or an inventory of our current initiatives and practices with respect to sustainability. Using the inventory, the Council and staff could then prioritize current and future initiatives.

Martin Berliner pointed out that the interest in sustainability ties in nicely with our proposed strategic planning process. Working within the strategic planning process, the Town Council may be in a better position to assign priorities.

Carl Schaefer stated that he sees some merit in this proposal, but it implies that there are things we could do better. If so, why aren't we doing them now?

Helen Koehn stated that she thought staff's suggestion was a good place to start. The United Nations has a good definition of sustainability. The issue impacts a lot of areas – from recycling to economic development. Lon has proposed a good concrete place to start.

Bruce Clouette added that from a policy perspective, staff's recommendation with respect to an inventory and including a discussion of sustainability within a strategic planning process is a good place to start. The Town Council is frequently too drawn to the immediate needs of the community; we need to step back and look at things for the future.

The consensus of the Town Council is for staff to proceed with the preparation of an inventory regarding current practices related to sustainability, and to prioritize initiatives as part of a strategic planning process.

4. Assisted Living

Martin Berliner reported that there has been some recent discussion within the community regarding the need for a local assisted living facility. This recent discussion has been prompted in part by the listing of the Warren property on the market. Many people feel this would be a perfect location for an assisted living facility. However, the asking price, the size of the parcel and the lack of water and sewer make the site challenging.

Martin would like the Town Council to think about this issue and how we should best proceed. He has always thought the town could serve as a facilitator of an assisted living project, but not as the developer.

Carl Schafer stated that another concern within the community is that the Warren property could be used for student housing. UConn would need to be involved in any assisted living project. The University of Virginia has helped to construct a facility, and experienced considerable return on its investment. The League of Women Voters might be willing to assist with a project.

Mayor Paterson explained that an informal group within the community has been reviewing the issue. The Council will need to decide whether to put this item on the agenda and how to pursue the issue. She concurs with the Town Manager that the town is probably better suited to serve as a facilitator as opposed to a developer.

Bruce Clouette commented that to pursue this project we might need a point person or a consultant.

Helen Koehn asked about the Warren property, and whether it fits into the town's long-term plans? Could we use it for purposes in addition to assisted living? Martin replied that the purchase of this property would exhaust our open space fund, and that we would probably need to bond the purchase.

Helen added that at some point the town would have its own water and sewer supply, which would enable us to better control our destiny. We need to implement the water supply study.

Bruce remarked that he likes Helen's perspective for the long term, but we need to be in close proximity to existing water and sewer connections for shorter-term projects.

Christopher Paulhus asked about the current availability of assisted living housing in the community. What we currently have is very limited.

The consensus of the Town Council was to add a discussion of assisted living to the agenda for the second meeting in January.

5. Strategic Planning

Matt Hart and Kevin Grunwald conducted a presentation regarding strategic planning. The presentation highlighted the following topics:

- What is strategic planning?
- What are the benefits?
- Role of the Town Council
- Role of the Staff
- Implementation
- Comments from Staff
- Discussion

During the discussion phase, the Town Council had several comments.

Alan Hawkins stated that he thought a strategic planning process would help to prioritize goals, coordinate efforts and provide direction from the top.

Alison Whitham Blair commented that it would be beneficial to connect staff efforts to larger goals. Mayor Paterson added that we have given conflicting messages to staff in regard to limited resources. Staff and the Council have done a lot in the past few years, but all these initiatives have been separated from one another – it would be good to pull them together.

Bruce Clouette discussed that Region 19 engaged in a strategic planning process when he served as a member of the board. He found it useful to critically examine what were thought to be common assumptions, and how they fit into the town's vision and mission. He is very much in favor of participating in a strategic planning process.

Carl Schafer remarked that he is reassured about the concept. We should solicit input from our advisory boards and committees.

Helen Koehn stated that a strategic planning process would serve as a guide for the Council.

However, a truly effective process requires a trained facilitator.

Alan and Bruce said that they like the balanced scorecard approach, and its emphasis on assessment and evaluation.

Alan addressed the issue of a facilitator v. a consultant. A facilitator would be preferable – we don't need someone to develop our goals, we need someone to help us identify our goals.

Helen added that a facilitator helps to elicit what people know.

Mayor Paterson stated that the consensus of the Council seems in favor of proceeding with a strategic planning process, and to investigate the balanced scorecard approach further.

Alan remarked that it would be important to include a tool to measure the progress made toward achieving our goals.

Helen added that she would like the opportunity to meet with a short list of potential facilitators recommended by staff.

Martin Berliner closed the discussion by commenting that it would be important to focus on resources on outcomes as opposed to the process.

6. Adjournment

Helen Koehn made a motion, seconded by Christopher Paulhus, to adjourn the meeting at 8:51 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew W. Hart
Assistant Town Manager